

October
2009

NEWSLETTER

MAV 00814

ATTENTION, ATTENTION, ATTENTION

The next meeting of the City of Moorabbin Historical Society will be on Sunday 25th October 2009. As always, the members meet from 1-2pm, and 'Box Cottage' will open, as usual, from 2-4pm. Everyone is most welcome.

Maintenance of 'Box Cottage':

- We have now purchased the new sign directing visitors to the "Grace Lewis" Room where all the society's Photo Folios, books, and other printed information, are located. It will be installed shortly. The final cost was \$76.40.
- Good news!! The Glen Eira Council painting contractors have been hard at work re-painting the windows and doors as requested by the MHS committee at the September meeting. It certainly is a great improvement.
- Our Treasurer, Dennis, has been hard at work in the garden, once again — I did a little work too.

Also Dennis has made a timber stand, (and painted it), to raise the lovely wooden, double trough, with its hand-wringer attached, to make more of a display in this area. (Children are welcome to turn the handle if they are GENTLE). The large mangle and galvanized tubs are close by. Our early washing machine is also located just a metre away. This area can now be a talking point for visitors.

ST PETER'S PRIMARY SCHOOL VISIT 'BOX COTTAGE'

As luck would have it on Monday 12th October 2009, the day organized for the primary school's visit, was a fine, mainly sunny, if rather windy day. The school bus made two trips to deliver the 1st Grade children to Joyce Park from the St Peter's Primary School, Bentleigh East. Michelle Rogers who is the Co-ordinator for Grade 1, had made it a proviso that the three Grade 1's must all come *together*, rather than one class at a time - this meant a total of 100 students, (aged between six and seven years), plus their three teachers, and several accompanying parents *all* to visit our little cottage over a period of about two or so hours!! It was an interesting challenge to plan and organize small enough groups to ensure that all the

CITY OF MOORABBIN
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

could participate, and not only enjoy the 'Box Cottage' experience, but hopefully also gain some knowledge of the district's heritage.

On the day we were thrilled to see that quite a few of the children had gone to the trouble of dressing-up in period costume. Even the teachers, had made quite an effort!

Once again, Dennis, Valma, Lesley, Robina and myself, rose to the challenge. I felt the most practical way to prevent crowding, and ensure each child had some personal attention, was to take each class separately through the cottage and barn, as well as into a special display set up in the "Grace Lewis" room. Subsequently, each class was divided into groups of five or six children. Each 'Box Cottage' volunteer then took just one of these small groups, and talked with, and showed those five or six children, one particular area of our historic collection. Then came the fun, as the little groups rotated to the next area and volunteer, until all five areas of the cottage had been visited. There was no break—immediately following on, the next class commenced their tour, and so on, until all the students had looked over the cottage and environs.

Due to the number of visitors, an extra group of articles were chosen as "hands-on". They were set-up and displayed in the "Grace Lewis" room, (Lesley was in charge in this area). Some of the objects in this area that the children really enjoyed were "listening to the sea" in our conch shells, looking at a paper wasp's nest, and some interesting bird's nests, and taking a turn of the old cake mixer; writing on the old school slate; looking at the nib pen and ink; and the early butter-churn and pats.

In the cottage "bedroom" area, Valma, as usual, charmed the children by manfully pumping away at the pedals on our little Italian harmonium, and playing "All things Bright and Beautiful". Some of the children were absolutely delighted to be allowed to have a little try, too. Other items they seemed fascinated with were, (as usual), the fox furs, (with their little "snappy" mouths), and the period clothing.

In the cottage kitchen, and dairy area, Robina amazed the groups with the thought that there were no microwaves, or electric irons, refrigerators, (reference to our old ice-chest), and that a fire had to be lit to heat the water even for washing, and tea in the "olden days". The adults were *astounded* to realize the size of the family that grew up in the tiny original cottage.

In the barn with Dennis, the children had great fun trying out the wringer, over our wooden washing tub, newly installed on it's bench - it really seemed a favourite! Dennis had brought along a tea-towel for them to "wring" ! They also had a little try of the manual washing machine and seemed *inordinately* delighted to sit in our old wooden desks. The old Chinese watering-cans on a yoke were also a winner.

It should also be remarked on how well behaved the children were, this certainly made the day a pleasant experience, even if an *extremely* busy one, for all the MHS volunteers. Overall, I'm sure the children did really enjoy their experience, and did gain some knowledge. At the end of the visit, the volunteers were thanked by the children, and each was presented with a St Peter's School key-ring by the students.

Finally, a donation of \$50.00 from St Peter's Primary School has been gratefully accepted on behalf of the MHS. Subsequently I have sent a letter of thanks to the Principal , and an acknowledgement in receipt of the donation. I also included some photos of our MHS volunteers with a few of the children.

In retrospect — I felt the day was a great success, but I think it would improve even further if visiting groups are kept to a smaller size to allow more time and interaction with the 'Box Cottage' volunteers.

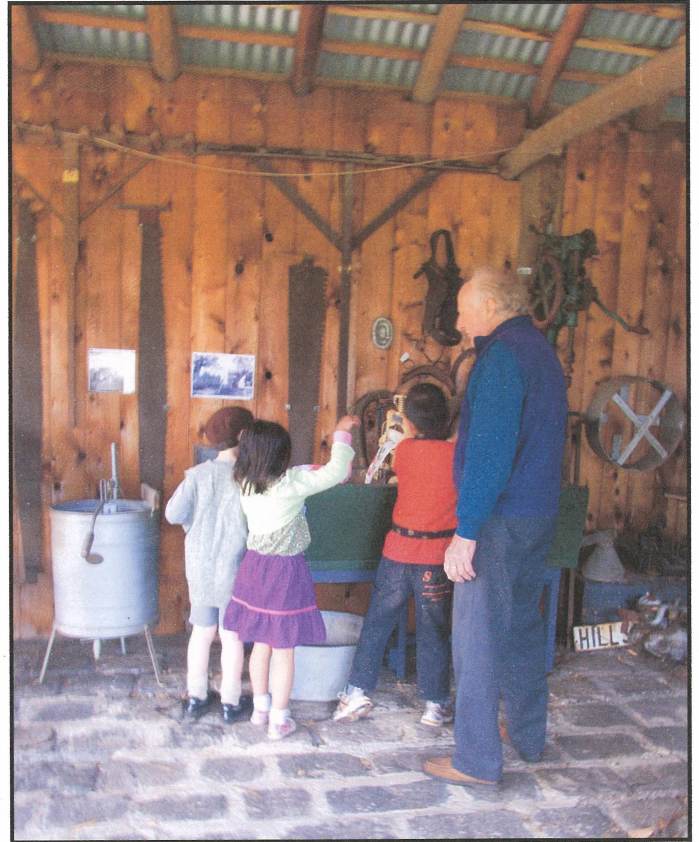
ST PETER'S SCHOOL VISITS 'BOX COTTAGE'
Monday 12th October 2009



LEFT: Getting ready for A three-legged race in Joyce Park.

BELOW LEFT: Thankyou to both Robina, and Valma, who showed children through the cottage displays.

BELOW RIGHT: Thankyou to both Dennis and Lesley, who "manned" our barn display, and the "hands-on" display in the "Grace Lewis" room, respectively.



THE KEYS FAMILY OF KEYSBOROUGH AND KEYS ROAD.

The following fascinating, unabridged story, was researched and written, by the late Mr Tom Sheehy in June 1981. It is part of his series on local history. MHS members will be aware that Robert Keys' silver Trophy for the "Best Fruit Garden" 1881-1882, Brighton District, is now displayed in the cottage.

N B: Unfortunately, there are no Footnotes listing the source of the information used in this article.

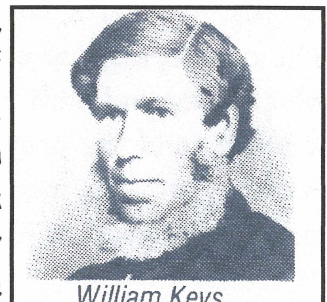
"On September 1840, an announcement was made overseas that was to change the character of 'migration from Britain to Australia. On that day England agreed to the demands of the Colony of New South Wales, to end the transportation of convicts to this country. From then on the whole of the country, after more than 60 years of transportation, was to become a nation to which only free settlers could 'migrate.

Port Phillip, (now Victoria), on the other hand, had from its very beginning as a colony on 29th September 1836, refused to accept any deported convicts. Although the District was under the direct control of the Governor of New South Wales, local residents vowed that no convicts should be landed in Melbourne. By standing firm on this point, many of the overseas people who applied for the right to 'migrate to Australia under the "Bounty System" of assisted immigration began to arrive at Port Phillip. The New South Wales Governor, George Gipps, granted permits for sponsorship of migrants to "all respectable persons or firms who applied for them", and then granted the nominators a cash bounty for each immigrant they brought to the country.

Thus between January 1839 and March 1841,

sixteen 'migrant ships found their way into Port Phillip, and among these was the "*Coromandel*", arriving on 11th July 1840. Amongst the passengers were the first two members of the Keys family to arrive in this country. Both were seeking a new life away from Ireland where unemployment was rife, and at the same time rural workers who had a job, received only the equivalent of 10 cents in payment for working a twelve hour day. Six-tenths of this income was deducted to pay for the tiny, windowless, damp mud hut provided by the employer on a rental basis as a "home". This left the worker with something like four cents a day to support a wife and family. The equivalent, to four cents would have bought as much as does eighty cents of today's (1981), money. This meant that a family of four, or even more, were required to live on one loaf of bread a day and nothing more, except perhaps an occasional reject vegetable from their own farm. There was no money to buy clothes, or anything else, yet to the grossly underpaid worker there fell the impossible lot of contributing to the needs of the unemployed.

Indeed the Bounty System of emigrating to Australia bought new hope to the Keys family of County Tyrone in Northern Ireland. It was the second eldest son, (William), and eldest daughter, (Mary Jane), children of George and Margaret Keys, who agreed to act as the vanguards for their family, and be the first to test the worth of such 'migration. The information listed in the shipping files of the '*Coromandel*' on its arrival in July 1840, listed them phonetically under the names of William "Kais" and Mary "Kais", no doubt because of their Irish brogue. William's occupation was stated as a labourer, and Mary Jane's as a house servant.



William Keys

Both could read and write, and were members of the Presbyterian faith. Records also show that William was engaged to work for John Hodgson, of Melbourne, for a period of six months for rations, and forty pounds per annum, . Mary Jane was to work for Mr I Shaw for a similar period, for rations and twenty pounds annually. William's age is listed as 19, and that of his sister as 17.

Ten months later, William and Mary's parents, (obviously spurred on by glowing reports arriving back in Ireland), gathered the remainder of the family and boarded the newly built barque of 451 tons, the '*Catherine Jamieson*', at Leith in Scotland. On the 29th May 1841, the barque set sail for Bahea, on the East coast of America, the first leg of her journey to carry the Keys family to their new homeland - Australia.

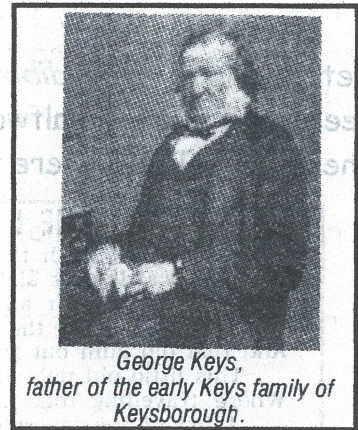
Before presenting the details of the Keys family as laid out in the shipping list, it perhaps should be pointed out that the listed ages of Bounty System assisted passengers, were not always quite correct - often as not, they were understated. The reasons behind cutting one's age back, as it were, had nothing to do with vanity; rather it was a matter of convenience, because the Bounty System of assisted passages was not open to anyone aged forty years, or over. Desperate people thought nothing of "forgetting" a few birthdays, if "remembering" them, barred them from becoming 'migrants. Thus we find George Keys, listed as 37, with a wife of 35, and an eldest son, Robert, aged 23. The Interment Book at the Brighton Cemetery seems a more reliable source of information. This book gives George's year of birth as 1792, suggesting he was 48 or 49, on arrival in Port Phillip. The same book lists George's wife, Margaret, as being three years younger at the time, which means she would have actually been about 45, or 46, on her arrival at Port Phillip.

George Keys and sons Robert, (23), and Isaac,(15), were each listed as labourers, while his wife, Margaret, was mentioned as being a house-keeper. The two daughters, Elizabeth, (13), and Margaret, (9), listed as house-servants, whilst the two youngest sons, Thomas, (7), and John, (2), were too young for a classified occupation. Members of the family were all listed as protestants coming from County Tyrone, Ireland.

Soon after arriving in Melbourne the family leased land at Preston and began dairy farming with 75 cows. Then in 1845, George obtained a leasehold over part of Alex Mac Donald's, '*Moodie Yallo*' cattle run, and built a home on part of the land now known as Keysborough. Following Victoria's separation from New South Wales, (when the old cattle run properties were being divided and sold up), Robert Keys purchased 377 acres between Bernard Street and Chesterville, Keys and Warrigal Roads. Robert, having made good through breeding horses and cattle, on 23rd December, married Charlotte Brown, aged 26, Robert was then 29. The couple, instead of going to '*Moodie Yallo*', moved into the living quarters of the '*Bush Inn*' which they had built for them at East Brighton. Robert's further success, this time as a publican, and the proprietor of a racecourse near the corner of Centre Road and Nepean Highway, in turn, made it possible for him to purchase land on Bernard Street, on the opposite side of the road to Holloway's '*Two-Acre-Village*'.

George Keys, in the meantime, was becoming worried about the lack of a Presbyterian Church in the district. Worse still, he couldn't even persuade a Presbyterian Minister to travel 12 miles from Brighton, through the "wilderness" to his 'Moodie Yallo' homestead. Finally, he settled for Mr Bickford, a Methodist Minister, who agreed to make the journey. It was with a good deal of pride the Minister made an entry in his diary saying:

"the first religious service in the locality was held at Keys' homestead in 1853, and it was attended by Mr and Mrs George Keys, Mr and Mrs William Keys, Thomas Keys and several neighbours. It was a unique spectacle in the midst of the Australian forest - a nucleus of light and moral force for the whole neighborhood"



Services then continued to be held on a regular basis at the Keys homestead until 1861, when a church was built. This iron roofed, wooden building, was used until a more permanent structure was erected in 1877. Four years earlier George Keys had died at the age of 81, his wife Margaret having pre-deceased him, at 70 years of age, in 1865. They are both buried in the Brighton Cemetery. At the time of his death, George owned land extending into the Shire of Moorabbin and as far down as Wells Road, which was then in Dandenong.

The original members of the Keys family were all public spirited people. Robert was a member of Brighton Council in 1860, and was closely associated with Sir John O'Shanassy. Robert persuaded Sir John, (when he was Premier of Victoria), that the eastern boundary of Brighton should be at Thomas Street, instead of Nepean Highway - despite the fact that Robert was a Brighton Councillor. Robert played an active role in the formation of the first Moorabbin Council in 1862. In 1871, he sold his hotel business at East Brighton, and went to work on his Cheltenham land where he had 15 acres under orchard along Chesterville Road. In 1881-1882 he took first prize for the best kept orchards in the district. Ultimately he served for seventeen years as a Brighton Councillor, and after moving to Cheltenham, (where he also became the Licensee of the "Exchange Hotel"), he served eleven years as a Moorabbin Councillor from 1876 -1887, including one term as Shire President. In fact he was still a Moorabbin Councillor when he died on 27th September 1887, aged 67. Robert left a widow and eight sons, sadly, his only daughter died at the age of seven years. Robert's wife, Charlotte, died on 14th April 1890.

It is interesting to note that during 1887, when many new municipalities were appearing, a younger generation of Keys was becoming interested in council activities. At Dandenong, Thomas Keys was a Councillor in the South Riding, and John Keys was Secretary/Treasurer and Engineer, and also held the same position on the Moorabbin Council. John also served with Cr George Keys as a Justice of the Peace at Cheltenham Court. Another George Keys was Collector and Inspector of Dogs for Moorabbin, while Thomas, the Dandenong Councillor, served on the Bench as Justice of the Peace at Dandenong.

Members of the Keys family were found in the agricultural societies, councils and as Members

of Parliament, from Moorabbin to Dandenong, Cranbourne and Berwick, for well over half a century. Each family member advancing progress, from the time when Melbourne was a small town that had only been in existence for 5 short years.

Yet, the *truly incredible* part of the story is seen in its beginnings, when two determined teenagers trekked halfway across world, to prove that there was a better world than the one their family knew, there for the taking."

"THE LITTLE BRIGHTON INN"

It was built of bush timber, as near I recall,
With wattle-bark slabs arranged round the wall,
Its big bluegum bar and fine roasting spit
' Was the talk of the town — there was none quite like it.
And that old gum out front, has sheltered for years
This little old pub with its hat round its ears—
Where travelling folk might always read there
A list of the tavern's most succulent fare!

And so as they came (they never passed by,
Without stopping awhile — for the taps ne'er ran dry).
We'd strike up a song, some cordial tune

On the old organ there, in the pub's back saloon.
And ladies in gingham, and bustles and wigs

Would join in a waltz (and even the jigs).
With bushmen and sailors and shearers and cooks —

On race day who'd line up to battle the books —
Put a sovereign on Midnight, or Black Jack or Nell —
Then cheer on their bets from the little Hotel!

What memories you hold, to who've known you before —
So a century will turn in years but a score!

What memories to bring as you weather the ages —
With your elegant ghosts, through history's pages!

Well — it's nigh on the hour, says the clock on the shelf —
So I guess that I'd better be moving meself!

So pour me a bumper, bartender — a gin!
And one for yourself — success to an inn!

← A nostalgic tribute
to Robert Keys' "*Bush
Inn*", established in 1847.
This poem was written by
"*Wayfarer*" in 1879.

"*Wayfarer*"'s poem was
most likely published
originally in the "*Southern
Cross*" newspaper.